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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NICOSIA 001944

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EUN](#) [UNFICYP](#) [TU](#) [CY](#)  
SUBJECT: "TRNC DAY" SPEECH: TALAT STICKS FOOT IN MOUTH WITH  
EU, QUARRELS WITH TURKISH MILITARY

REF: NICOSIA 1916

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. "TRNC President" Mehmet Ali Talat delivered a petulant rhetorical broadside during November 15 commemorations of the 1983 Turkish Cypriot unilateral declaration of independence (UDI). The "good" parts of Talat's speech (throw-away references to the need for rule of law and democracy, close relations with the EU, and Cyprus reunification) were overshadowed by angry accusations against Tassos Papadopoulos and -- more worryingly -- the provocative suggestion that EU "discrimination" against Turkish Cypriots resulted from a "Nazi" or "Crusader" mentality. Talat's overwrought and ill-timed speech has soured the diplomatic atmosphere on the island, drawn attention away from the Turkish Cypriots' (comparatively) constructive attitude in the recent UN process (reftel), and lent credibility to Greek Cypriot claims that Talat is "just another Denktash." The Turkish Cypriot press has largely ignored the language of the speech itself and focused instead on Talat's argument with local military commanders -- who reportedly changed the November 15 order of ceremonies without Talat's permission, inserting unwanted "separatist" speeches calling for the "TRNC" to "live forever." The fact that Talat's November 15 performance is viewed in the north as a courageous pro-settlement gesture in the face of military pressure shows just how far Turkish Cypriot public opinion has drifted since the unambiguously pro-EU days in 2004. END SUMMARY.

SHAKING HIS TINY FIST AT THE SKY  
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¶2. (C) "TRNC President" Talat delivered a provocative and ill-timed speech during November 15 ceremonies marking the 23rd anniversary of the Turkish Cypriot UDI (full text emailed to EUR/SE). With Turkish FM Gul (who also spoke about not giving in to Greek Cypriot "blackmail") looking on, Talat accused the Greek Cypriot leadership of trying to swallow the Turkish Cypriots with a policy of "osmosis" and personally attacked ROC President Tassos Papadopoulos as the "lawyer, financial consultant, and psychological supporter of Milosevic, who slaughtered his people of Bosnian and Albanian origin in the middle of Europe and in the eyes of the EU."

¶3. (C) Turning his ire on the Europeans, Talat criticized them for "embracing" Papadopoulos -- and (implicitly) of condoning his dilatory behavior. He accused the European Union of failing to deliver on its 2004 promise to end Turkish Cypriot isolation. How should the Turkish Cypriots respond to this? Talat asked. Perhaps Europe was "approaching the Turkish Cypriots with discrimination, cultural racism, and religious hostility that resembles mentality of the Crusaders and Nazis."

¶4. (C) Talat made some attempt to counter-balance this outrageous rhetoric, but it was half-hearted at best. He

expressed hope that the Europeans would fulfill the ideal Turkish Cypriots aspired to -- that different cultures, religions, and societies should be seen as "richness" and accepted. He also stressed his continued desire for reunification. Rather than an act of division, the UDI should be viewed as a step toward solution, since the "TRNC" would eventually evolve into "one of the principal pillars" of a federal, united Cyprus. Talat went on to call for continued internal reform, democracy, rule of law, and "social justice."

#### SKUNK AT THE PICNIC

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15. (C) Reaction to Talat's speech was swift and negative. Hovering above the fray with visible satisfaction, ROC spokesman Christodoulos Pashardis said he would not respond to Talat's "insults and accusations." But the pro-government press had a field day with Talat's remarks, accusing the Turkish Cypriot leader of slinging mud, of racism, and of "toeing" Turkey's hard line.

16. (C) More importantly, however, European and UN diplomats are furious at Talat's remarks -- especially in light of current Finnish-led efforts to broker a ports/Varosha deal that could finally unblock Turkish Cypriot trade with the EU. At a meeting the following day with P-5 poloffs, UN DCM Cibor and our French and British counterparts agreed that the Nazi reference, especially, was insulting and could only damage the EU and UN negotiating atmosphere. Several EU ambassadors today told Ambassador Schlicher that they were sending the message to Talat that he should apologize for his "Nazi" and "Crusader" references.

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17. (C) Turkish Cypriot advisors close to Talat privately acknowledge that the "president's" rhetoric has backfired. One "minister" who is a childhood friend expressed frustration that the "ill-considered" reference to Nazis and Crusaders has drawn attention away from the fact that the Turkish Cypriots have resumed "a more flexible" stance on the UN track. The UN decision to submit its bridging proposal in writing (reftel) was a "victory" for Talat that should have put "Papadopoulos on the run." Instead -- for now, at least -- the Greek Cypriots were off the hook.

#### ARE WE TALKING ABOUT THE SAME SPEECH?

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18. (C) Talat's friend went on to say, however, that the "president" was understandably frustrated with the failure of his "constructive policies" to bring a solution any closer. Turkish Cypriot voters were frustrated by the fact that Papadopoulos seemed to suffer no penalty for his litany of sins ("after all," he noted, "Tassos really did work for Milosevic and he really did block a solution in 2004") -- and were furious at the EU for "doing nothing" to help them. Neither Turkish nor Turkish Cypriot politicians could get away with taking a "soft line" toward the EU these days, he claimed. The Nazi talk was "a little much," he admitted, but "some angry words" were unavoidable.

19. (C) Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the Turkish Cypriot press has virtually ignored the provocative content of Talat's speech. Instead, Turkish Cypriots are abuzz with controversy over reported tensions between Talat and the Turkish military over the order of ceremonies at "TRNC Day." Apparently unaware that the military protocol office had inserted a speech by a serving officer, Talat sat in visibly stunned silence when the uniformed man took to the podium and delivered a Denktash-style address calling for the "TRNC" to "live forever" -- and promising that the military would "never abandon" the Turkish Cypriots. Talat pointedly refused to clap for the speech, and summoned the local force commander to his office the following day for what aides say

was a furious dressing-down. Noting that Talat has previously clashed with the military over protocol and ceremony (to say nothing of differences over who ultimately wields real power in the north), Turkish Cypriot media have spun the "TRNC Day" ceremony as a clash of wills between a democratically-elected, pro-solution civilian leader and the Denktashian old-school military establishment.

COMMENT

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¶10. (C) Talat's remarks have done damage to his reputation and to his ability to deliver for his constituents. Bicomunal barbs, while harmful, are nothing new and Papadopoulos has made his share of outrageous statements (including a famous denial that any Turkish Cypriots were killed in the intercommunal violence of 1963). But Talat's attack on the EU is a new low and undercuts his most important asset -- credibility as a serious pro-solution, European-oriented interlocutor. Talat's remarks are unlikely to derail UN efforts to kickstart a settlement process and they do not change the fundamental dynamics of the Finnish proposal. They do, however, poison the atmosphere of trust that will be required for progress on either track. That this has not dawned on most Turkish Cypriots is evidence of how far public opinion in the north has shifted since 2004 -- and how difficult productive bicomunal dialogue has become.

END COMMENT.  
SCHLICHER